DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 984 RC 012 544

AUTHOR Blomstedt, Bob; And Others
TITLE Gestalt Psychology and Bilingual Education.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Educational Therapy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Humanistic Education; *Learning Processes; Learning Theories; Mexican Americans; *Multicultural Education; *Psychoeducational Methods; Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Gestalt Psychology; *Holistic Approach

ABSTRACT

Several concepts detailed in Gestalt psychology/therapy appear to have a close relationship with many concepts being applied in bilingual education. The primary contribution of Gestalt psychology to learning theory in the U.S. is an emphasis on perception and reintegration of relationships within an organized whole. To the teacher this means that learning activities must combine the elements of the three basic domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) in an approach based on confluent education (merging feelings and thinking into one holistic learning experience). The key to confluent education is the interactive process that takes place between the cognitive and affective domains in any given learning experience; this interactive process becomes the "gestalt" of the learning experience. The influence of Gestalt psychology and therapy on confluent education in bilingual education can be utilized to promote the idea of the totally integrated person. If the bilingual child is to function as a whole, with the potential to develop and expand his/her horizons to include a wider range of society, he/she must be allowed to function in an environment which will promote such growth. Such an environment is fostered by effective bilingual education. A background in Gestalt psychology for bilingual classroom teachers seems to be a step in the right direction. (AN,

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Bob Blomstedt
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED198984

GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bob Blomstedt
Jay Fuhriman
Frank Lucido
Tadeo Reyna
Oralia Sanchez
Kingsville, Texas

1980

Much research and publication has been accomplished in the field of Gestalt Psychology since its introduction in Germany in 1912. The field of Bilingual Education as it exists in the United States today is still in its pioneer stage with much research still needing to be done. A review of available literature on Gestalt Psychology and Bilingual Education resulted in little evidence of published material on the analysis of relationships between the two fields. There appears to be a close relationship, however, between several concepts detailed in Gestalt Psychology/Therapy and many that are currently being applied in the field of Bilingual Education as it develops in theory and in practice.

The theory of Gestalt is that "there are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole." (3:2) Gestalt Psychology refers to the "system of psychology which holds that experiences should be studied not in segregated parts but as units, and which maintains that the organism always reacts as a whole, regardless of specific stimulus." (10:24) It was received in the United States when American psychologists placed attention on the problems of perception and on the fields of problem-solving and personality. The primary contribution of Gestalt Psychology to learning theory in America is this emphasis on perception and reintegration of relationships within an organized

RC012544

whole. Applied to education this means that the end goal of Gestalt theory in practice is to educate man as a whole.

To the teacher this means that learning activities must combine the elements of the three basic domains of learning. The cognitive domain and the affective domain appear to be predominant in Gestalt learning. The third domain, the psychomotor domain, appears to be inseparable in the Gestalt concept from either the cognitive or affective domains. In other words, there is always some type of physical activity in both the affective and cognitive domains that cannot be separated from effective teaching. To combine the elements of the cognitive and affective domains means that the classroom teacher will be using a teaching approach based on confluent education. Confluent education means that the teacher must merge feelings and thinking into one holistic learning experience. It means that the teacher must focus learning experience on both the affective and cognitive domains. The key to confluent education is the interactive process that takes place between the cognitive and affective domains in any given learning experience. The interactive process becomes the "gestalt" of the learning experience; it is the behavior which is not determined by that of its individual elements, but where the postprocesses are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole.

A student is an integrated whole made up of individual units such as mental, physical, cultural, social, economical, and linguistical components. Denial of any unit would cause distortion of the whole, because each unit has a role and a function, but not as an isolated unit. This concept of interwoveness has a basic

influence on Bilingual Education which attempts to take the student in the "here and now" based on his individual needs, feelings, and interests. There cannot be a separation of the affective from the cognitive if human or confluent education is to develop a positive outcome.

The basic components of a bilingual education program generally include: (1) the teaching of basic concepts in the child's home language, (2) language development in the child's dominant language, (3) language development in the child's second language, (4) the teaching of subject matter in the child's dominant language, (5) the teaching of subject matter in the child's second language, and (6) the teaching of the child's cultural heritage to help the child develop a positive identity, self-assurance and confidence. The bilingual teacher has an excellent opportunity to use the confluent approach in teaching language and the language experience approach can become a prime medium of confluent teaching. By utilizing the language experience approach, children are not only studying the English language structure - its alphabet, its spelling and its sentence patterns - they are also expressing their own ideas, interests and feelings about themselves. Thus students learn the skills of second language acquisition and at the same time focus on their own affect, such as feelings, needs and interests. Their growth in language proficiency parallels their growth as persons. The two growths exist as one whole in the learning and developmental experiences of the bilingual child.

To the "gestalt" teacher, man is an integrated person; he is neither thought nor feeling, but both. In order to achieve full knowledge of any one event both thoughts and feelings must be considered. It takes awareness and feeling, as well

as thinking and logical planning, for a person to adequately adapt to the ongoing changes of a developing society. Gestalt Psychology and Therapy influencing confluent education in Bilingual Education can be utilized to promote this idea of the totally integrated person. Listed below are a series of concepts of Gestalt Therapy and their possible implication for developing programs in Bilingual Education:

1. Gestalt Therapy tries to make contact with the present moment; it asks "what" and "how" questions and rarely asks "why" questions. "Why" questions lead to an endless and heady rumination about the past which increases resistance to present experience.

2. Gestalt Therapy is directed toward helping people make contact with their experience with vividness and immediacy rather than simply talking about the experience. Talking only results in an endless exercise that leads to unproductive discussion. Rather than incessantly talking about problems in bilingual education, teachers and administrators should be encouraged to feel the pain, sadness, and confusion felt by many students in their classes, creating situations wherein they experience first-hand the feelings of the student.

3. Gestalt Therapy believes that it is important to bring everything to the "now" - the present. Otherwise individuals tend to hang on to the past in order to justify their unwillingness to take responsibility for themselves and their growth. They fail to shoulder their responsibility and instead blame others.

In the bilingual situation, discussions are generally guided to the present. The past is related to the present - to the "now."

4. Gestalt Therapy implies that unfinished business usually involves unexpressed feelings such as rage, resentment, hatred, pain, anxiety, grief, guilt, abandonment, etc. Even though the feelings are unexpressed, they are associated with distinct memories and fantasies. Because the feelings are not fully experienced, they linger in the background and are carried into present life in ways that interfere with effective contact with oneself and others. Unfinished business persists until the individual faces and deals with the unexpressed feelings.

Many bilingual children, especially Mexican-Americans, have had experiences of unfinished business with teachers and other adults, often Anglo or anglicized Mexican-Americans at school. No matter what they do or try, it is not good enough to please the teacher and win lasting approval. Very often as these children progress through school, they encounter teachers and other adults at school who do accept them and do not harbor bias, prejudice, etc. Yet the unfinished business prevents them from embracing that acceptance and possibly finding a satisfying and fulfilling relationship with the teacher. Students in bilingual education are encouraged to complete the unfinished business by expressing it and experiencing satisfaction in such expression. He is assisted in accepting that satisfaction and not allowing it to recur in the future.

5. Gestalt Therapy seeks to promote the growth process and develop the human potential rather than seeking instant joy or cure. The growth process is a process that takes time. The bilingual education process is designed to promote the growth process and development of the human potential. It cannot be expected to produce instant success, instant improved self-concepts or instant cure for problems that have been decades in the making.

6. Gestalt Therapy adhers to the principle that humans are organisms, self-

regulating, and not independent from their environment. They need physical and social environments in order to live. Humans exist and relate to the external world just like other forms of life. An organism cannot be separated from its environment. A plant taken out of its environment cannot survive, and neither can a human being if taken out of his environment. The segment of the world in which one lives is part of him. One's world goes with him wherever he goes.

The bilingual child is an organism and is not independent from his environment. If the child is to function as a whole with the potential to develop and expand his horizons to include a wider range of society, he must be allowed to function in an environment which will promote such growth. Bilingual education encourages his home environment to be extended to his school environment by using his language as a medium of instruction and using his culture as a tool of teaching. In other words a learner's environment is created similar to the environment in which he thus far has been trained. As the crucial development takes place and his abilities expand, his environment is modified and extended to encompass the entire community in which he lives.

A good background in Gestalt Psychology, therefore, would seem a logical plus in the development of effective teachers for bilingual classrooms. The relationships between the principles of Gestalt Psychology/Therapy and the principles inherent in effective bilingual education seem to parallel each other to such a degree that to teach the principles of one is to imply the teaching of the principles of the other.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Brown, George Isacc. Human Teaching for Human Learning. New York: The Viking Press. 1971.

2. Corey, Gerald. Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy. California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company. 1977.

3. Ellis, Willis D. A. Source Book of Gestalt Psychology. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1974.

4. Galyean, Beverly. "Human Teaching and Human Learning In The Language Class: A Confluent Approach." California: Confluent Education Development and Research Center. 1976.

5. Good, Carter V. Dictionary of Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. 1959.

6. Perls, Fredrick; Ralph E. Hefferline; Paul Goodman. Gestalt Therapy. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc. 1951.

7. "Task Force Findings Specifying Remedies Available for Eliminating Past Educational Practices Ruled Unlawful Under Lau v. Nichols." Office for Civil Rights.

8. Wanderman, Abraham; Poppen, Paul; Ricks, David. Humanism and Behaviorism; Dialogue and Growth. New York: Pergamon Press. 1976.

9. Wertheimer, Max. Productive Thinking. New York: Harper. 1959.